



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

With which is incorporated "THE MUSICAL REVIEW."
OCTOBER 1st, 1853.

CHOIRS AND ORGANS:

THEIR PROPER POSITION IN CHURCHES.

THE following remarks on the Position of Choirs and Organs in Churches were written for and delivered before the members of the Yorkshire Architectural Society, by Mr. WILLIAM SPARK, of Leeds, at a General Meeting held in the Philosophical Hall, Leeds, on Wednesday, May 26th, 1852; the Rev. Dr. Hook, Vicar of Leeds, in the Chair.

I PROPOSE in this paper to consider the various positions occupied by Choirs and Organs in Churches, to discuss the several reasons which may be adduced in favor of or against each locality, existing or possible, and thus to endeavour to establish some general principle, by reference to which the question may be readily adjusted.

A taste for vocal harmony, especially that connected with the services of our Church, is spreading widely in this Country; and (by a happy coincidence) concurrently with a revival of ancient ecclesiastical architecture.

It is generally allowed that a very important part of architecture is the arrangement and fitting of churches for the service of the Church; and I trust I shall, to some extent, be forwarding the settlement of the great question of structural suitability in the edifice for the all-important purpose to which it is dedicated, if I make a few observations on the position of Choirs and Organs.

"So many men, so many minds"—and though I may hold different opinions on this interesting and important subject from many of my hearers, I shall endeavour to make some remarks which may be useful to those who wish to place Choirs or Organs in positions different from those which I should choose.

On the *historical* part of my subject,—after having waded through the pages of many a dusty folio, and the fat quartos of the Musical Historians, Burney and Hawkins,—I find I can add but little to what has already been given by Mr. Jebb in his admirable work on the Choral Service; and as I shall occasionally have to refer to his brief but pregnant remarks, I deem it right at the outset to quote them.

In reference to the position of the Choir in churches, Jebb remarks—"The proper place was, and still is, the chancel; where, from the instructions of Archbishop Grindal, it appears that the incumbent had his stall. Here the clergy, at least those assistant to the officiating priest, ought to remain, even when the prayers, by the direction of the ordinary, are read in the nave; here the

Choir, or those assistant in Divine service, ought always to be placed. * * * No Church, however small, ought to be without a regular chancel; its omission was never known till the last century. The gallery, the modern place of the performance, is altogether an innovation of later times, and like that last mentioned, *POPEISH* in its origin. That corrupt idolatry of music which prevailed in Italy, induced the admittance of persons into the Choir who were obviously unfit to sit among the clergy, and therefore were placed, like mere instruments, in a loft. The effect, ecclesiastically considered, is bad in the extreme. There is an appearance of theatrical exhibition in this obtrusive elevation of the singers, who frequently attract the gaze of the congregation (perhaps, I should rather say of the audience) below; who, while the musicians are performing, turn their backs upon minister, altar, and everything sacred, absorbed by that which a savage would actually suppose to be the idol of our worship. For many reasons, indeed, I would prefer the ancient and unobtrusive position of the organ on one side; which could be so contrived as not to be glaringly unsymmetrical. But, in any case, a loft for singers should be altogether avoided. It argues great unskilfulness in music to require such a proximity to the organist, and the effect is always better when the voices and organ are separated by some interval. But a much higher and more important reason exists for the location of the Choir below, in the body of the Church or chancel. The ministers of divine worship, such as the lay clerks and boys, or regularly appointed singers, have a sacred office to perform, and in this capacity should occupy a place near the clergy. * * * The modern practice quite cuts off the clergyman from the singers, and gives the latter an indecent elevation. In all these observations, I am introducing or recommending nothing new, but merely pleading for a return to a practice prescribed by the spirit and example of the Church of England; and which practice she gives as the clearest pattern in the arrangement of her principal Churches, to this hour. It is evident that such an arrangement obviously requires no additional room, but merely an exchange of places."

"The *Organ*," says Mr. Jebb, "was placed on one side of the Choir, generally the north, and towards the east end. Gervais relates that in the 12th century such was its position in Canterbury Cathedral, on the north side *over* the transept arch;" and our author then proceeds to give a list of those places where this arrangement is still observed. In a note, however, we find the following:—"In Neale's Views of the Churches of Great Britain (Vol. 2) there is an extract from a MS. account of Melford Church, in Suffolk, written about the time of the Reformation, in which the following notice occurs: 'There was

a fair Rood Loft with the Rood, Mary and John, of every side, and with a fair pair of organs standing thereby.' It appears, too, from Britton's *Arch. Antiqu.*, Vol. IV., that the Organ in the Beauchamp Chapel, at Warwick, stood over the West door; and Aubrey states that the Organ in Trinity College Chapel, Oxford, stood over the Choir screen. I particularly noticed in the Louvre, at Paris, a few months ago, that in more than one of the many paintings there by Peter Neuf, representing the interior of old churches, the Organ was placed in a small gallery on the south side of the church."

In the majority of the churches in France, the Grand Organ is placed over the *west* door—an arrangement which in too many instances has the bad effect of blocking up in part the western window. Mr. Jebb says this custom was not older than the 17th century, when Holland was seized with the mania of building gigantic and noisy organs, which he terms "enormous music mills," and he strongly condemns their employment in churches under any circumstances.

History and precedent, then, are not at all agreed as to the *original* position of Organs in Churches, for this kind of instruments seems before the Reformation, as now, to have stood in all sorts of places;—on Choir screens, Rood screens, over west doors, over and in transept arches, on the floor of the chancel, over the altar, as in the Royal Chapels of Versailles and the Tuilleries; under the tower, round corners, in hearing, but out of sight, and *vice versa*;—in short, it would be impossible to say, I think, not where Organs have stood, but where they have not stood in Churches.

Speaking again of the position of the Organ, Mr. Jebb remarks:—"Of late the Organ has been restored to its ancient position in the Cathedral of Canterbury, the Parish Church of Leeds, and the Temple Church in London."

I cannot myself ascertain which is the one "ancient position," seeing that all sorts of positions have been adopted. I may observe, too, that the Organ in the Temple Church stands on the north side, and that in the Parish Church of Leeds on the south side. Again, with reference to our Author's observations on "gigantic organs," I think it must have escaped his notice that the introduction of large Organs is by no means of modern date; and if we are to rely on history for one point, we may, I presume, safely do so for another.

Now, I find the following statement in more than one work:—"St. Jerome says, there was an Organ at Jerusalem which could be heard as far as the Mount of Olives."

If the distance, therefore, from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, be about a mile (as I understand it is), the Organ to which St. Jerome alludes must have

been infinitely more powerful than any of the "enormous music mills" of the present day. Far be it from me to defend the employment of the huge, screaming, noisy organs which are but too often a disgrace to our churches, and frequently a means of destroying altogether the effect of what is of far greater consequence than any instrumental music—the combined and hallowed efforts of a congregation of worshippers to praise God with the "human voice divine." I am no advocate for noise, and especially instrumental noise in our churches; all I wish to have understood is the difference between the use and abuse of a large, powerful, and sweet-toned Organ.

For the general execution of the Choral Service (which is usually *performed* by choirs numbering from six to thirty voices), a small instrument may be sufficient;—indeed, what is the Choir Organ for, but principally to accompany the singers. No judicious organist ever does employ the full power of his instrument (if it be a large one) in the ordinary accompaniments of the choral service,—he rather confines himself to the use of those soft and sweet stops, which will be at once a sufficient support for the singing—and a means of giving that variety of expression to the music, which the ever varying sentiment of the words seems to require.

Notwithstanding, I would ask, are there not times and occasions in the due performance of our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, when the effect of a grand, and—to use a technical term—a "well-balanced" organ, "let out," as Master Mace hath it, "into all its fulness of stops,"—I ask, are there not times when it is awe-inspiring and powerfully sublime?

For instance, who can have heard a crowded congregation in a large church sing with heart and voice that glorious, time-honored tune—the Old 100th Psalm, accompanied with the full power of a great and beautiful organ, and not acknowledge the powerful aid and thrilling effect which a grand organ gives to some portions, at least, of our church service?

Again, who can read the account which Master Mace gives of congregational singing in York Minster, in 1644, and not acknowledge the value of a large—an "enormous"—organ, on special occasions, and under peculiar circumstances?

After speaking of the number of people, lords, knights, gentlemen, &c., who attended service in the Minster every Sunday, so that the Church was (as he might say) "cramming and squeezing full," Master Mace adds—"Now here you must take notice, that they had then a custom in that Church, which was, that always before the sermon the whole congregation sung a psalm together with the quire and the organ, and you must also know that there was then a most excellent large, plump, lusty, full-speaking organ, which cost (as I am credibly informed) a thousand pounds.

This organ, I say, when the psalm was set, being let out into all its fulness of stops, together with the choir, began the psalm. But when that vast concurring unity of the whole congregational chorus came *thundering* in, even so that it made the very ground shake under us, (Oh! the unutterable, ravishing soul's delight!) in the which I was so transported and wrapt up into high contemplation that there was no room left in my whole man, viz., body and spirit, for anything below divine and heavenly raptures."

When the Rev. J. Jebb and many other writers on the choral service condemn the employment of large organs in our churches, under any circumstances, in my humble opinion they appear to forget to notice the distinction which should be made between a congregational and a performed service—in short, it seems altogether to be lost sight of, that an organ to support a great body of singers—an assembled multitude of worshippers—should be infinitely larger and more powerful than an instrument required only to support a few singers who are engaged to perform the choral service to the congregation. The "enormous" organs in Holland were erected principally for the purpose of accompanying the large number of worshippers who sing most lustily in unison the magnificent melodies of grand, though simple, chorales, the music of which is printed—as it should be in England—with the words of the psalms and hymns, thus enabling all, who are able and feel disposed, to take part in one of the most delightful and elevating portions of public worship.

I must crave pardon for having digressed somewhat from the particular subject under consideration, and yet I am sure we must all feel a deep interest in whatever relates to the due and efficient performance of those portions of our church service, to which music forms such a powerful auxiliary.

The position of an organ will generally depend on that chosen for the choir, and sometimes (but in a smaller degree) the position of a choir must depend on the position of the organ. Occasionally, the position of the choir must depend on that chosen for the minister.

The chief question on which the position of choirs and organs will depend in parish churches is this:—Is the service of our church a Congregational Service, and the prayer *Common Prayer*? Is the choir to be considered as part of the congregation; are we—as I have before ventured to ask in another paper*—to lay it down as a fundamental rule in parochial worship, that choirs are not organized to sing to or for us, but *with* us, and should not their position in churches be such as would best conduce to bring about this, the main object of their services? In churches where the congregation is not entirely in the

choir, as in cathedrals, but in the nave, as in most parish churches, is the chancel the proper place for a choir? Again, can it be clearly shown, that the organ is so insignificant a part of the *fittings* of a church, or of so little consequence in the due and efficient celebration of divine service—especially when that service is choral service—that it should be concealed from view as much as possible, and its tones smothered and its whole action and mechanism perilled by being placed (as I understand it is in the beautiful church at Howden) under a low arch, near a dead, damp wall, and surrounded with pillars? By concealing this noble ecclesiastical instrument as much as possible, it has been said, that two very important advantages are gained;—first, an uninterrupted view of the architectural beauties and proportions of the building in which it is placed; and, second, that the tones of the organ affect the congregation more when their source is, as it were, unknown.

The first is, indeed, a most important point, and should always be kept in view both by architects and organ builders; but, if the organ, from its unquestionable superiority over all other instruments, is the instrument most suitable to the majesty of divine worship, can it with any propriety or reason be placed in such a situation as neither to be fairly seen or heard? And yet it is a fact that the majority of church architects waive this important consideration in preparing their plans for any new structure; so that if the erection of an organ be not specially named, and is not brought forward till some time after the completion of the church—which is often the case from want of funds and other causes—the architect is astonished and confounded some fine morning at being told that an organ is to stand in a situation which he feels will assuredly ruin the proportions of his building.

Surely, the architect of the beautiful little church you have, I believe, gentlemen, been visiting this morning (St. John's, Holbeck), cannot really believe, if he has considered the matter at all, that the hole in the wall over the north porch is a suitable place for an organ? And yet I am told, on credible authority, that it is intended to place an organ there, and such a one as will be worthy of the church, and of the liberality of its pious founders—the choir, it must be remembered, being at the other end of the church.

No person, who is at all acquainted either with music or the principles of acoustics, can imagine that an organ placed under a low arch, with three sides of it close to dead walls—in fact, in a stone box—will produce the same effect as an organ placed in an open situation in the church where the vibration is considerable. "Organ builders," says an intelligent writer on this subject, "well know the difference between voicing an organ for a recess in a small chapel, and one for a central

* Lecture on Church Music.

situation in a spacious church. In one case where the obstacles are numerous and close to the organ, it is almost impossible to produce a proper quality of tone, especially from large pipes. Whereas, in the other case, the organ builder soon finds the required tone, owing to all obstacles being at a distance, and the vibration of each pipe not being disturbed but in its 'periphery,' thus causing an agreeable reflection of sound, such as we find on listening to the organs in our cathedrals and other large buildings." It is a singular fact connected with the amount of resonance in different buildings, that the enormous organ built by Mr. Willis, which stood at the west end of the Crystal Palace, and which contained three sets of manuals, an immense number of stops, and a large pedal organ, was not in effect so powerful as an instrument in a Church at Islington, with one row of keys and eight stops. This anomalous effect must be attributed solely to the total absence of reverberation from the immense quantity of *glass* in the Great Exhibition.

From what I have stated at the commencement of my paper, it will be seen, I think, that no one position for organs has exclusively been adopted in any age of the church,—though it must be admitted that from about the 15th century they have been generally placed, in parish churches, in the western gallery,—and in cathedrals and collegiate churches on the screen which separates the choir from the nave.

The present generation being at liberty, then, to legislate on the subject, I have ventured, as a church organist, to draw up a few rules which, I hope, may be of some service to those who wish to place organs and choirs in churches in such a position as will best suit the requirements of the choral service—and, at the same time, not disfigure the architectural beauties of the building.

Rule I.—An organ should not play over one choir to another choir.*

Rule II.—The people should not be between the choir and organ.†

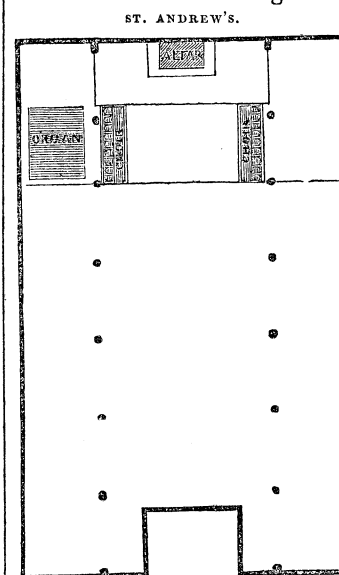
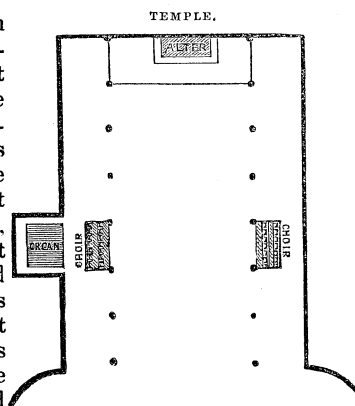
Rule III.—The singers in a choir must not have their backs to the people.

Rule IV.—A choir should *never* be in a gallery.

In churches where there is a double choir and an organ, it seems to me that the organ may often be advantageously placed in the centre of a low organ screen, in the old and common position. As a general rule, choirs should as nearly as possible form an equilateral triangle with the organ. It is an important question, and one deserving of close investigation, whether listeners, or those who depend on choirs for assistance, should be east of the choirs; and it is certainly not advisable for the congregation to come between the choir and organ. I cannot help remarking here,

that the usual places appropriated to the dignitaries in our cathedrals appear to be the worst in the church, and it is very curious that the chief places should be west of the choir.

I stated in Rule I. an organ must not play over one choir to another choir, as at the Temple Church, and at St. Andrew's, Wells-street. It has a one-sided effect; and, as the organist generally hears one choir above the other, and the choir nearest the organ hears considerably



more of the organ than the other choir opposite, it is frequently the cause of serious faults and blemishes in the performance of the music. For this reason the organ should always, if possible, be placed considerably above the heads of the singers,—the tones of an instrument proceeding immediately before a choir will, assuredly,

rather confuse than assist them. If therefore, circumstances require the organ to be placed on the floor of a church, the sound-board should be fixed as *high* as the architecture, or other points, will allow.

To be concluded in our next.

CHURCH ORGANISTS.—No. II.

THE mode in which the funds of the established church are distributed has long occupied the attention of church reformers of our own time; with their object we have nothing to do: it may happen that the virtuous indignation expended on the subject may at last be discovered to take its rise in a kind of "fox-and-grapes" desire, not merely to alter the system but to reverse it; so that they who are loudest in complaint may have the felicity of turning the tables upon the

* *i. e.*, when the organ is placed on the ground.

† As at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge.